

# Tema Polêmico

## Em foco: A eleição de Donald Trump para a presidência dos Estados Unidos da América

### Letter to my friends

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Tacoma, WA  
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Dear Friends,

This morning I wrote you this letter. It is my own personal reaction to the election last night. I feel the need to openly work out the significance of this election with you and think about the challenges we have ahead. With your permission, I will continue.

I am shocked by the results of the elections last night. I truly believed that our country would not vote for someone like Donald Trump, who has used overt racist, misogynistic and discriminatory speech in his campaign. I am disappointed in the United States. I don't know what to say to my friends abroad, I am ashamed of myself as a US citizen.

I understand that we cannot reduce all of those who voted for Trump into one large category of racist, misogynistic people. I know people, good people, who supported Trump. Many Trump supporters are middle-class, white families that are unsettled by the cultural and social changes that have occurred over the past years. They attribute these changes to the Obama administration and a liberal agenda, which does not respect their religious beliefs or way of life. Discussions and policies

regarding sexual practices, gender identity, reproductive justice, police violence, and discrimination have been understood by many white people as threatening their understanding of themselves as good people and disregarding their own cultural heritage. I interpret these changes rather as demographic, cultural shifts due to ideas and practices of our youth and the growing population of people of color. Do not misunderstand me; I am not putting the blame on those that have raised these issues or who have made claims to their rights. I have also encouraged conversations about these issues. I believe or at least believed that we needed to discuss things more openly and honestly. I did not understand these conversations as a threat.

However, I think that I miscalculated the backlash. I thought we were making progress. I miscalculated the feeling of disorientation, of anomie, and the strong divisions within our country. I miscalculated (along with many people) how these resentments could dislodge racist and sexist undercurrents and surface in ways that seemed positive, such as an affirmation of patriotism, of desire for a government responsive to the people, of a questioning of the elites, or of change. These affirmations helped to unify a disperse group of people around one person, who represented hope and change to them, who gave them permission to see themselves as victims of an oppressive liberal system. I believe a cult of a leader was created (in many ways similar to the adoration bequeathed to Barack Obama during his first campaign and maybe even Bernie Sanders). Social psychologists give us insights into this phenomenon of almost religious devotion to a leader.

This entire election must also be contextualized within a situation of economic uncertainty. I analyze this economic context as a result of deregulated financial irresponsibility and greed that plunged us into a deep recession in 2008 and from which we are only now recovering. Eight years of slow recovery has had its toll on working-class families. I also see it as a change in our economic base from a manufacturing to a service and technological economy, which requires new skills and new jobs. These technological advances mean that we will never go back to

the good old days of solid manufacturing jobs. Once again, we are in a changing world, where we are unsure about the future, where many families who have been accustomed to improving their lot, have experienced a downward shift in which the new generation does not foresee the relative improvement that their parents had. While racialized groups are all too aware of stagnating economic hopes, this has frightened many white families.

Trump found a way to frame and articulate these insecurities. We have heard the hypnotic repetition of ideas about the disastrous plight of our bleeding economy, the dangers and impositions of immigrants and Muslims, the lack of respect we have abroad, which like a recurrent melody, we end up singing ourselves without even realizing it.

Clearly, a candidate who received the endorsement of the Ku Klux Klan also has the backing of other groups who openly accept deplorable national policies and actions of hatred and racial divisions. These groups have been given a platform and we will begin to hear more from them. However, I think that most people who voted for Trump were indifferent to his racism and sexism. They looked to his economic promises or his potential Supreme Court choices as the deal breakers. The hurtful statements Trump directed toward minorities, women and the disabled were explained away as business as usual, locker room talk, humorous and insignificant political banter. This prevalence and normalization of bigotry is evidenced in our blindness to it.

We of course cannot lose sight of the other side, the reasons why people did not vote for Hilary Clinton. There are numerous justifications for this. We can look back to 20 years of systemic attempts to discredit her and her husband. Rejection of Hilary's initial health care plan partially because it was a project of a first lady overstepping her bounds, Whitewater investigation which plagued the Bill Clinton presidency but ended up in nothing, Monica Lewinsky affair taken to preposterous extremes, the Benghazi investigation where millions of tax dollars were spent to find no incriminating evidence, and of course the incessant talk about her emails. Numerous articles and political observers have called attention to the double standard of inves-

tigating Hilary is every move while giving Donald Trump a free pass on his business dealings, his lack of preparation, his taxes, his untruths and so on. I don't think we can underestimate the sexism inherent in the campaign and its continued prevalence in the United States. How could such a qualified candidate lose to such a disqualified one? Gender is part of the answer. This heavy baggage of unrelenting criticism was a burden that Hilary simply could not brush off. Or perhaps it is, once again, our desire for a fresh candidate who can inspire us.

I also think about how minority groups did not support Hilary more enthusiastically. I think there are reasons why people who did not support Trump, also found her difficult to vote for. I understand that a wealthy, white woman is not the ideal figure for cultural, social and economic renewal and that especially minority groups have reasons to be distrustful of Hilary's loyalties. Her husband signed the three strikes you are out law; as Senator, Hilary voted for the Iraq war; she appears to favor many policies out of expediency rather than true commitment; she gave highly paid speeches to Wall Street...

However, I think that the election of Trump represents an extremely dangerous phenomenon. To me, he is someone who has legitimized disrespectful speech, who through his words and actions has validated misogyny, ethnocentrism, racism and disrespect for the disabled to bolster a feeling of "us" versus "them", who had previously embarked on a blatantly, racist campaign to defame, discredit and "other" the President of the Republic, Barack Obama, who encouraged violence at his rallies, who demonstrated very little knowledge of policy or world politics, who proposed the proliferation of nuclear arms, who repeatedly exaggerated or lied when campaigning, who has exploited workers on his commercial projects and consumers who have purchased his products, who has played the system against his responsibility to the United States as a citizen. These actions go beyond simple political differences.

At the risk of overstating, and thereby discrediting my fear, I look back to recent history. I see how the Weimar republic in Germany from 1919-1933 was attempting to create a democracy

out of the shambles of post WW1. There was cultural and intellectual creativity, a new democratic constitution, the inclusion of women's participation in government, but within a context of severe economic recession. Out of this context, a figure arose who scapegoated the largely assimilated Jewish population and other minority populations as the cause of German woes. He was successful in building a discourse of patriotism and of German self-affirmation which transformed Germany into the most barbaric society of the 20th century.

I remember Chile in 1970, when Salvador Allende was elected president on a socialist platform. With the carrying out of socialist policies of redistribution of land and wealth, there was an organized backlash. The country became extremely polarized, resulting in the death of Salvador Allende and a military coup, organized by Augusto Pinochet, who ruled as a dictator through 1990. Chile still suffers from these divisions.

The United States is not Germany in 1933 or Chile in 1970. I don't mean to imply that a catastrophe is imminent and I don't want to encourage even more divisive behavior. The United States is the wealthiest nation in the world with a strong democratic tradition, with checks and balances which we need to uphold. The world is ever more connected and is also watching. We have responsibilities regarding climate change, human rights agreements, trade agreements and military engagements. Countries especially from the global south are emerging. The United States is a prominent actor but within a complex set of international relationships. However, I think it is important to remain vigilant to protect our democracy. History has demonstrated that there are no guarantees. We need to continue to support human rights among us all, examine issues of discrimination and promote the common good. It is not the time to give up or slide into complacency.

Despite talks of smooth transition that I heard early this morning, I think we are going to be stretched in our abilities to work together as a nation, to learn how to talk with one another so that we don't disregard the rule of law or foment violence. Yesterday, racism and sexism were given a boost in the name of nationalism. We need to creatively find ways to reclaim our

patriotism, defend these checks and balances, and uplift all people. There is hope for change. We can meet this challenge.

Thank you for reading this. I welcome your thoughts.

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